

Neoplatonism And The Hegelianism Of James Doull¹

D. Gregory MacIsaac
Carleton University
gregory_macisaac@carleton.ca

I

At the end of his introduction to “Neoplatonism and the origin of the Cartesian subject”, James Doull makes a final preliminary point about the character of Neoplatonism:

...something of the Aristotelian noesis noeseos eludes this return to it from the temporal freedom of the Hellenistic sects [i.e. through Neoplatonism]. Aristotle speaks of a divine thinking where what is divine is not so much divine because it is absolutely one as because it is the active nous which having all the intelligible in its possession is the actuality of that unity itself. There is in this concept, to speak theologically, an equality of persons and not a primacy of the paternal or substantial. Thus if Neoplatonism is for Hegel a realization of the Aristotelian idea it prepares also for the disclosure of another philosophy of what more that idea contains²

Doull accepts Hegel’s reading of the history of philosophy, for which the Neoplatonic schools are a necessary moment between the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, and the Modern. For him, the culmination of the history of philosophy is to be found in Hegel’s own system, where what is implicit in the Aristotelian idea of God as self-thinking thought has become fully explicit in Spirit. Aristotle’s God is the pure actuality which serves as the *telos* of all things, but that God cannot also be the efficient cause of the divided world of becoming. What Neoplatonism supplies is an account of the One as

¹ I would like to thank Bernard Wills and Eli Diamond for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² *Animus*, vol.4 (<http://www.swgc.mun.ca/animus/1999vol4/doull4.htm>), par. 14; p. 222. This essay is also published in slightly altered form as chapter five of *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull*, edited by David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 219-249. In this volume the essay is entitled “Neoplatonism and the Origin of the Older Modern Subject”. References are to the paragraph number of the *Animus* version followed by the page number of the *Philosophy and Freedom* version.

comprehensively the principle of all things, as the efficient and final cause of the universe, from which all divided being and becoming unfolds, and to which it returns. However, because the Neoplatonic One is indivisible simplicity, according to Doull it is not an adequate principle of the divided reality which comes from it. What is needed, and what is supplied in Modern philosophy, culminating in Hegel, is to see that the divisions which unfold from the principle of all things are present in the principle itself, as its own self-articulation. In short, according to Doull and Hegel, the truth is a principle in whose self-thinking thought the divisions of all of reality are contained, from the structure of individual self-consciousness to the movement of history.

Professor Doull's exposition is meant not only to explain how Hegel thought Neoplatonism contributed to the constitution of Modern subjectivity, but by implication, is meant to justify this Hegelian reading of the place of Neoplatonism in the history of philosophy. Doull's reading goes hand in hand with his acceptance of the Hegelian system itself as the completion of the movement which he is explaining. What this means is that in order to accept Doull's article as an accurate account of this part of the history of philosophy, one must also accept the Hegelian system. Such an acceptance would pose a problem for most people now.

It was the distinctive virtue of Professor Doull not only to have had the courage needed in the English-speaking world to take Hegel seriously, but to have dared to think in a Hegelian manner. He founded a school of thought, centred at the Dalhousie department of classics and spread elsewhere by his students, whose Hegelian inspiration dictates a study of the history of philosophy through a close reading of Ancient and Medieval texts with an explicitly philosophical eye. There is an interpenetration of philology and philosophy in this school which is indeed a great virtue, and which is sadly the exception rather than the rule among contemporary departments of philosophy or classics. However, the Achilles heel of the particularly Hegelian way of reading philosophy is its need to see all previous movements as leading towards Hegel himself. This is the problem with Doull's article on Neoplatonism which I cited at the beginning of this paper. The historical investigations of the last century have allowed us to have a more accurate account of the details of Neoplatonic philosophy than was available to Hegel. This would likely not have troubled him, for what Hegel thought he understood was Neoplatonism's animating principle. But this is precisely what is at issue. Is it proper to see Spirit as the animating principle of Neoplatonism, as of all philosophy? Or does a more historically accurate account of Neoplatonism reveal that the One is a different sort of principle, and that to situate Neoplatonism as a moment between Aristotle and Descartes in a Hegelian manner is fundamentally to misunderstand its character?

My earliest philosophical studies were at the Dalhousie department of classics, beginning just after Professor Doull retired. My interest in and further work on Neoplatonism would not have been possible without the foundation I received there. It is an indication of the absence of dogmatism in that school that my contribution to this volume of *Animus* in Professor Doull's honour is critical of his approach. In this study I will show how Neoplatonism is not properly understood as a moment within the Hegelian dialectic. The Hegelian analysis obscures both the true character of the Neoplatonic One,

and the Neoplatonic account of the relation between thought and its object, because it treats these positions as deficient versions of itself. We must remember that the Neoplatonists had before them the long tradition of Aristotelianism and Middle Platonism, in which the first principle was a self-consciousness. They did not elevate the One beyond *Nous* simply because of the precedence of Plato's *Parmenides*; rather they interpreted that text from what they considered to be philosophical necessity. They thought that it was philosophically superior to conceive of the First as One rather than *Nous*/Being. And just as in Hegel, I think, the decision of this school as a whole to write of the First in this manner has its origin in their analysis of human consciousness.

This topic is obviously a very large one, and I will make only a few points.³ I will look at a few of the most important reasons why the Neoplatonists themselves rejected *Nous* as a first principle. But I will also point out a few virtues of Neoplatonism which have only become open to us today. I will suggest that a sort of Neoplatonism that takes into account the history of philosophy in the Modern and Post-Modern periods might exhibit the virtues of both Hegelianism and Heideggerian phenomenology while avoiding their pitfalls, in that it gives a plausible account of human finitude, while allowing for a metaphysics based on what in us is more than merely human.

II

Hegel's respect for Neoplatonism is clear from his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. However, Hegel disagrees fundamentally with the Neoplatonists over how to conceive of the first principle of all things. Neoplatonism elevates the One beyond *Nous*, an elevation of the one over the many which is imitated at all levels of the system. Hegel, on the other hand, holds that the divisions which emerge in the dialectical movement of Spirit are divisions of Spirit itself.⁴ With regard to Professor Doull's Hegelian criticism of Neoplatonism, the most important thing to examine will be how this logic plays out in the Neoplatonic structure of consciousness. I will show below how it dictates both the internal structure of *Nous* and Soul, and the relation between these two thinking hypostases.

First, however, we should examine how Hegelianism looks from the Neoplatonic perspective. It will appear deficient, just as Neoplatonism looks deficient from a position

³ For a detailed study, see W. Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus*, Frankfurt, 1972 (French translation by P. David, M.-C. Challiol-Gillet et J.-F. Courtine as *Platonisme et idéalisme*, Paris: J. Vrin, 2002). For comparison of Neoplatonism and Heidegger, see Jean-Marc Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis: Plotin, Proclus, Heidegger* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2001).

⁴ For example, Doull says of Damascius that his position advances beyond Proclus, because the transcendence of the One over the many begins to be broken down ("Neoplatonism and the Origin of the Cartesian Subject", par.78; p. 236): "The primary opposition of 'ontic' and 'henadic' is all but dissolved in a concept of what is not one as first of all unified - not 'limit' as opposed to 'unlimited', but transcending this division in relation to the undivided. The intelligible is thus not the product of prior 'henadic' elements but itself equally 'henadic' or divine. It comes into view with this knowledge of a unified division that the ideal world is in truth not a second level below the One but rather, as taught by the Oracles and other revelations, the One itself as triune. An intelligible world more within the grasp of a human thought subject to exclusive contraries can be thought no more than that: a world of human discourse."

which thinks of the First as self-thinking thought. The first problem with Hegel's system, from a Neoplatonic perspective, is that it seems to lack a fundamental ground. The Neoplatonists would recognise in the spontaneous and free self-unfolding of the Hegelian notion the counterpart of their *Nous* and Soul. But they consider thinking to be an unfolding of a transcendent unified ground just as much as it is a spontaneous self-unfolding. So, for example, the thoughts of Soul are about *Nous*, because without *Nous* as a source, Soul would have nothing to think. The object of thought precedes the thinker, and the thinker's thoughts are an unfolding of this object, which remains prior. Put in simple terms, the Neoplatonists would ask Hegel what Spirit's thought is about, because it cannot be about itself.

They would also see in Hegel, as in all philosophy of the Modern period, a flattening of perspective. The distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* bequeathed to the Moderns by the Latin Medievals maps onto the Greek distinction between *dianoia* and *Nous*, but it no longer plays the same ontological and epistemological role. *Ratio* is not thought to unfold *intellectus* in the way that the Soul's *dianoia* unfolded *Nous* as its fertile source. From the Neoplatonic perspective, *ratio* in the Modern period is orphaned, and without *Nous*, is seeking another source of truth. It would be in this light that they would think of the employment of a criterion of truth in thinkers like Descartes or Kant. On the other hand, Hegel does not think thought can have an external criterion of truth, and in this is closer to the Neoplatonic mark. However, from their perspective, the Hegelian system would seem to conflate *Nous* and *dianoia*. In Neoplatonism, *dianoia* is an unfolding of *Nous* in Time, but it is not the emergence of the noetic Forms themselves into *genesis*. Rather than a sort of reduplication, it is the creation of an entire new level of intelligibility, a level more multiple and divided than is *Nous*. Because of this, the Neoplatonists would be critical of the historical aspect of Hegel's system. It would not seem possible for them that the moments which Spirit possesses in itself could also be manifest in history. Their most obvious objection would be that *Nous* as the self-thinking thought which creates the first determinations of all things has a self-transparency which simply does not exist on the level of *dianoia*.⁵ However, even if they could accept Hegel's higher level of isomorphism between the historical and ahistorical aspects of Spirit or the Idea, they would still have a problem. In order for the temporal and atemporal movements to be the same, it would seem that one of the two must become like the other: either the atemporal development of *Nous* should be infected by historical

⁵ See *Enn.V.8.4.*, speaking of *Nous*: "For it is 'the easy life' there, and truth is their mother and nurse and being and food - and they see all things, not those to which coming to be, but those to which real being belongs, and they see themselves in other things; for all things there are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light. Each there has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, so that all are everywhere and each and every one is all and the glory is unbounded; for each of them is great, because even the small is great; the sun there is all the stars, and each star is the sun and all the others. A different kind of being stand out in each, but in each all are manifest." See also *Enn.V.1.4.*: "[*Nous*] blessedness is not something acquired, but all things are in eternity, and the true eternity, which time copies, running round the soul, letting some things go and attending to others. For around Soul things come one after another: now Socrates, now a horse, always some one particular reality, but Intellect is all things. It has therefore everything at rest in the same place, and it only is, and its 'is' is for ever..."

contingency, or individual thinkers in their historical appearance must be necessitated by the atemporal movement of *Nous*. It is not simply a question of the moments of *Nous* eventually being discovered by contingently existing human beings, or even a question of something like the Soul of the Cosmos rolling through the noetic moments in its circling activity around *Nous*. Rather, to use Neoplatonic language, Hegel seems to be speaking of contingently existing human beings, in their historical collectivity, exhibiting the noetic ideas themselves in the same order as they appear in *Nous*. This only seems possible if either the historical movement is necessitated, or if the universe is upside down and *Nous* is created by history. Neither option is palatable to a Neoplatonist.

Related to this is the question of the end of history, thought of as the completion of this development. If we are supposed to regard the *Phenomenology* as presenting the complete course of the determinations of Spirit, then it is difficult to see how Hegel can avoid the Heideggerian criticism of covering over Being by taking its historically contingent determinations as necessary and complete. In Neoplatonic terms, Hegel seems to be saying that when humanity reaches a certain completion of its development, *Nous* can be known in dianoetic terms. This implies that the universe has a transparency to *dianoia*, to philosophy, which leaves the door open to Heidegger's criticism of technology. Heidegger is correct, it seems to me, to point toward the more fundamental attitude which lies behind what he calls technological rationality, that will to master human and non-human Being. This more fundamental attitude is one which sees all of reality as completely transparent to human consciousness. The truth of Heidegger's own position, it seems to me, is to recognise the limits of human understanding. He aims to show that *in principle* there are possibilities in Being which are not yet open to human thinking, that this will always be the case, and that because our thinking about Being is in principle not exhaustive, the premise of technological rationality which sees Being as completely transparent is mistaken. The more fundamental danger is not a technological nightmare world, but rather the cessation of human thinking which brings such a world about. Heidegger and Neoplatonism are on the same page at least in their contention that human thinking is in principle never complete, and so must always return to its source.⁶

III

I will sketch in a very simple manner two tendencies in the development of Neoplatonism. One can think of its history as containing two very general streams, one which is able to use the name Being to refer to the first principle, the other which prefers to call the First only the One or Good. If we exaggerate the difference between these two streams we could talk of an ontology, opposed to a henology.⁷ To be sure, this manner of

⁶ They differ, of course, in how they conceive of human thinking and its source.

⁷ For a much fuller exposition of these streams, and their importance for contemporary theology and philosophy, see W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle: Being or Unity?" *Dionysius IV* (1980) pp.133-172; "Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, edited by Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, Studies in Christian Origins (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 139-184; "Aquinas' doctrine of God between ontology and henology," for Colloque: La philosophie et la question de Dieu. Histoire, développement, perspectives, Université Laval (Québec) les 10, 11 et 12 avril 2003, to be published in the Actes of the Colloque, in press.

speaking captures an important distinction within Neoplatonism, but it is part of my argument that these tendencies are complementary rather than opposed.

The ability to call the first principle Being can be traced back to Porphyry's use of the infinitive *einai*, "to be", as an adequate name for the first principle. This is at the origin of the stream of Neoplatonism which enters the Latin West most influentially through Augustine. This is the strand of kataphatic, or positive theology, in which the names by which we name God do in fact signify in some way what he is. The other strand, stemming from Iamblichus and Proclus and moving through the Pseudo-Dionysius, names God as the One. But even this name does not tell us anything positive about God. It is rather only a name which, because it approaches most closely his simplicity, allows us to remove from our thinking any positive conception of God. This is seen clearly in the conclusion of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*, where even the negations concerning the One must be removed, so that we may approach it in silence. This is the apophatic, or negative theological tradition.

The traditions meet, among other places, in Aquinas. From Dionysius, Aquinas receives a Procline logic of procession and return which allows him to order his treatment of the names which apply to the whole Godhead, as well as to the Trinitarian procession of persons within the Godhead, and the procession into creation. However, from the Porphyrian/Augustinian tradition, Aquinas can call God *ipsum esse*, Being itself. The use of the infinitive, *esse* or *einai*, is not meant to call God abstract Being. Rather, it is meant to elevate God above determinate beings, while at the same time drawing them together, because the determinations of being which emerge in creation have their seat in the simple self-relation of the pure act of Being which is their source. *Ipsum esse* is simple, because it is not divided into existence and essence, as is the case in creatures. But it is also Being, and so exhibits internally the procession and return which structures being.⁸ This conception allows Aquinas to contain his Procline logic within a Godhead conceived as the simple act of Being, in a manner which would be impossible for Proclus or Dionysius.⁹ So for Aquinas, God is the simplicity demanded of the Neoplatonic One, while holding within this simplicity the Being of the Neoplatonic *Nous*. This picture is

⁸ The primary appearance of remaining, procession and return is in Plotinus' analysis of the emergence of *Nous*/Being from the One. See, for example, *Enn.V.1.7.*: "But Intellect is not that Good. How then does it [the Good] generate Intellect? Because by its return to it it sees: and this seeing is Intellect."

⁹ See W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle: Being or Unity?" *Dionysius IV* (1980) pp.133-172; see p.169-170: "But no reversion, not even self-reversion, can occur in the One without destroying its essential simplicity [in Proclus]. This is not so in Aquinas. The *exitus-reditus* form is found at all levels of his *Summa*...Thomas has moved beyond his predecessors. He has pushed the logic of the finite up into the divine unity itself. As described above, the questions on the divine substance are ordered so as to flow out from the simplicity and return to the unity. This logic is effective in the content as well. God's being is self-relation. The highest is self-subsistence...Descending, the self-subsistent *esse* progressively unfolds its simplicity to reveal itself as knowing and willing, a Trinity of Persons and finally, as creator and saviour of the world."

complicated in Aquinas by his Aristotelian epistemology.¹⁰ We can only know in this life *that* these two aspects are one in God without knowing *how* this can be true.¹¹

A Hegelian reading of this history could see in it the conditions for the truth of Modern philosophy. God as the simple pagan One is incapable of containing any determination. But the transposition of *Nous* into the One holds the seeds of the later development, in which the principle itself contains the determinations which spring from it. There can be no consciousness in the One, but from a One/*Nous* there can develop the absolute idealism which Hegel articulates. Therefore the Neoplatonic philosophy, insofar as it conceives of the First as one comprehensive cause, is a stage towards the development of Hegelianism.¹² But this has led, of course, to the Heideggerian reading of the same history, which sees Being turned into a being, the perfect being, *ipsum esse subsistens*, with all of the criticisms of onto-theology and technological rationality which it implies.

We have here two opposed understandings of the same history, with complementary dangers. If the first principle is a One/*Nous*, and hence eventually consciousness, then according to Hegel we can have speculative philosophy, because the determinations of our own thinking are also the determinations of the principle itself, and of all that emerges from the principle. But according to Heidegger, this philosophy is merely a covering over of Being with the contingent historical determinations of human thought, specifically those which turn the world into a mere object, and lead to the mastery of nature in technological rationality. Heidegger's solution, however, is no more palatable than that of which he accuses Hegel. *Dasein's* openness to Being may avoid technological rationality, but it exacts too high a price. Finitude, historicity, language - these are poor substitutes for the aspirations which philosophy has had since Plato. Further, contemporary retrievals of Neoplatonism which seek a direct relation of the human soul to the One beyond Being as their principle, and so, by de-emphasising or

¹⁰ See W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas' First Principle: Being or Unity?" *Dionysius IV* (1980) pp.133-172. See p.141 and note 38 for more precision on Aquinas' epistemology.

¹¹ So Doull speaks in "Neoplatonism and the Origin of the Cartesian Subject" (par.83-105; p. 237ff.) less of Aquinas, than of a movement from Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa, situating Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham in between.

¹² See Doull's "Neoplatonism and the Origin of the Cartesian Subject", par.103-104; p. 242: "[regarding Cusanus]...The simple intuition of the One, which was for ever for Neoplatonists the only unqualified truth, has no longer below it another thought which moves to it through oppositions. The *docta ignorantia* reduced all discourse to scepticism. The conclusion was then drawn that division and difference reside in and belong to the actuality of the creative good. [104] He is then dissatisfied with this name [the *non aliud*] as not indicating clearly that God is not only the indifferent foundation of difference but the primary division and actuality. That infinite potentiality which also is he thinks might better be named '*possest*.' But that name has the inconvenience that it suggests a difference and not the absolute unity of these moments. The most appropriate name he therefore finds to be '*posse*', so far as this indicates the infinite actuality of infinite potentiality." See also par.106; p. 242: "The new philosophy [the Modern] began where the old ended, namely where the One beyond all else passed into the self-consciousness which knew the finite as its own..."

omitting *Nous*, seek to agree with Heidegger while avoiding his criticisms, seem only to fall into the same historicist position.¹³

IV

This has been a lengthy preamble to my examination of the Neoplatonic logic of the one over the many as it governs the structure of thought, but it was necessary to suggest what is at stake. My examination will focus in particular on two aspects of the philosophy of Proclus, but I intend my observations to apply to all Neoplatonism. The first aspect is the relation between unity and multiplicity in the activity of thinking, and the second is the crucial distinction between noetic and discursive reason.

With regard to the first point, the relation between unity and multiplicity could be conceived in the following terms: either the One stands completely aloof from the multiplicity which it generates, or somehow that multiplicity can be found as the moments within the One itself. Here is the source of seeing mutually opposed apophatic and kataphatic traditions. Doull sees the first tradition as a necessary moment leading to its completion in the second. However, I think these two traditions can be seen as complementary in a manner which does not smuggle the noetic multiplicity *into* the One, and so does not have to posit the seeming impossibility of a simple One which also contains in itself a triadic self-reversion.

Professor Doull describes the activity of knowing in Neoplatonism in the following manner: “The knowledge the noetic self-consciousness has of itself and of its world as its own is abstract so far as the moment of division or mediation is transitional only and lost in the return.”¹⁴ In Proclus both *Nous* and Soul are structured according to a remaining in, procession from, and return to their cause: the One for *Nous*, and *Nous* for Soul. This triadic motion structures not only the relation between the various orders of Proclus’ system, it gives the internal structure of what has become orders or *taxeis*, which correspond to the Plotinian hypostases. Doull’s reading of this threefold activity is that in the moment of return, the division which emerges in the moment of procession is lost, and hence the principle cannot contain the divided procession, which becomes only a vanishing moment. It is in order to correct this that he thinks philosophy moves towards Hegel, whose principle is self-dividing.

But the mistake here which Doull makes is in his characterisation of the moment of return. I have studied this relation before, and I make here some of the points which I

¹³ Cf. W.J. Hankey, "Neoplatonism and Contemporary Constructions and Deconstructions of Modern Subjectivity," a response to J. A. Doull's "Neoplatonism and the Origins of the Older Modern Philosophy" for a festschrift for James Alexander Doull, *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull*, edited by David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) pp. 250-278. See also W.J. Hankey's contribution in *Lévinas et l'héritage Grec*, par Jean-Marc Narbonne (pages 1-122), suivi de *Cent ans de néoplatonisme en France: Une brève histoire philosophique*, par Wayne Hankey (pages 123-268), Paris/Québec, Collection Zétésis, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin/Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004.

¹⁴ "Neoplatonism and the Origin of the Cartesian Subject", par.43; p. 227.

have made in another place.¹⁵ Proclus' *Nous* is divided into three moments: noetic, noetic-noeric, and noeric, or intelligible, intelligible-intellectual, and intellectual. These three moments are hierarchically arranged according to the priority of the object moment over the subject moment, in a motion of remaining, procession, and return. But the same logic governs the internal structure of each moment.¹⁶ Within the intelligible moment, we find the One-Being, Eternity, and the *Autozôion*. The One-Being is the single principle which is Being, as pure determination or the idea of determination. Before this principle we find the One itself, Limit and Unlimited, and the henads, because they are not determined to be one thing as opposed to another. The One-Being is the principle that all below it will be determined to be *this* as opposed to *that*, or contain the moment of difference within their self-identity. Eternity is the principle of procession or fertility, it is the One-Being considered not in itself, but as productive of a multiplicity of determined beings. The *Autozôion* is the paradigm to which the Platonic Demiurge in the *Timaeus* looks when fashioning the world, so Proclus considers it to contain the highest forms, or *megista genê* of the *Sophist*: Being, Same, Other, Rest, and Motion. The *Autozôion*, as the third moment, has proceeded from the One-Being through Eternity, and is the moment of return. According to Professor Doull, it should be a transitional moment only, and lost in the return. But this is not in fact what we find. Rather, the *Autozôion* as containing the *megista genê* is the principle of the further unfolding of the Neoplatonic cosmos, because all further multiplicities are unfoldings of the five primary Forms which it contains. What is going on here?

Nous is a thinking principle, and in the movement from the One-Being to the *Autozôion* we have a thinking movement. For Proclus, and I think for all Neoplatonists, thought is an unfolding or dividing motion. Unfolding requires three moments. It requires a principle to be divided, which is spoken of as remaining, and it requires the double activity by which that principle is divided, which is spoken of as procession and return. The moment of procession shows that the unfolding activity *is not itself* the principle, and the moment of return shows that this activity, which is itself that which has unfolded, *has* a principle. The activity of thinking is grounded in the remaining moment as a proximate unity, in this case the One-Being, but in its own activity it produces a multiplicity which it refers back to the unity in which it remains, because the multiplicity has come from there and is ultimately about that unity. But that does not mean that the divided result vanishes. This thinking is a free activity precisely because what emerges is not precontained in the principle in which it remains, and it does not vanish because what emerges just is what the thinking activity has produced with this particular unity as its ground. This can be stated in the strongest possible terms. In Neoplatonism, to know *is* to unfold a unity and produce a multiplicity which is not that unity. Knowing leads to loving, and the fulfillment of the moment of return, not because the cognitive multiplicity vanishes as an act of knowing, but because the purpose of knowing is an affective union higher than knowledge. Professor Doull thinks that the divisions which emerge in

¹⁵ See D.G. MacIsaac, "Projection and Time in Proclus," in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2002) pp.83-105.

¹⁶ With the exception that for external reasons the noeric moment is a hebdomad, not a triad.

procession vanish in the return. Rather, the divisions stand in the return, but at the end of the activity the thinker puts aside the cognitive divisions, not because they are untrue, but because he puts aside thinking itself.

Proclus speaks of the Forms existing *prôtôs* and *deuterôs* (primarily and secondarily) in *Nous* and in Soul,¹⁷ and he speaks of the *logoi* in the Soul's essence as existing before its *energeia* in a 'hidden' or 'secret' manner.¹⁸ This does not mean that the principle of thought already contains what emerges in the thinking activity, but rather thought is an activity by which the thinker *makes* itself into a divided image of its principle. Soul is not a copy of *Nous*, it is a divided image of it. The one is the foundation of the many, which are its image and which point back to it. The many are contained in the one only in the sense that they are bound to it as their origin and end. Plotinus expresses this well at the beginning of *Enn.V.2.*:

The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, but it is all things as their principle; for in a way they do occur in the One; or rather they are not there yet, but they will be. How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that Being exist, the One is not being, but the first generator of Being.¹⁹

To posit the emergent content as already contained within the principle is not an acceptable solution to the question of how real novelty comes to be in the unfolding of the universe from its principle, for the Neoplatonists.

So does the *Autozôion* know the One-Being? The answer to this is both yes and no. It does not know the One-Being, only in the sense that the divisions of the *Autozôion* are not themselves the One-Being, and were we to think that the *megista genê* were the content of the One-Being we would be confusing the end-point of an activity with its beginning or ground. But in another sense the *Autozôion* does know the One-Being, because to know simply is to produce freely a multiplicity beginning from a unity. The *Autozôion* knows the One-Being because it is the end point of an activity which has its beginning in the One-Being, and we call this activity knowing. The mistake made when we oppose the negative and positive aspects of Neoplatonism is that we oppose the beginning and ending moments of the same activity to each other. If we forget the

¹⁷ *El.Th.*prop.194.

¹⁸ *In Eucl.*46.1: "It possesses them all in an essential and secret manner"; *In Eucl.*56.13: "But whatever exists secretly (*kruphiôs*) in it is brought to the imagination with extension and with parts."

¹⁹ *Enn.V.2.1.* Armstrong translates the first sentence as, "The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, *but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence* [*italics mine*]." The italicised section translates *all' ekeinôs panta*. I find this a questionable translation, and have rendered it as, "but it is all things as their principle."

continuity of the moments of remaining, procession, and return, then we think of the unity and multiplicity as simply other than each other. And hence the knowledge which we have does not touch the One-Being in any manner, and we have apophasis. If we assimilate the return to the remaining, collapsing their distinction, we have a kataphasis which makes superfluous the activity itself, for what is arrived at in the result was present at the beginning all along. Rather, this triadic motion is both apophatic and kataphatic, apophatic because what is thought is not the One-Being, but kataphatic because it is what is thought about the One-Being. I am speaking here of the relation between the three intelligible moments of *Nous* (the One-Being, Eternity, and the *Autozôion*), but the observation holds generally in Proclus' system: for the total structure of *Nous* in itself, for the relation of *Nous* to the One, and for the relation of Soul to *Nous*.

You will notice here that I am arguing against a certain interpretation of Aristotle's idea that thought and its object are one, or that thought rests in its object. This may also seem to be contrary to the Neoplatonic position that we have as our aim to rest in our causes, and ultimately in the One. I think that thought does not rest in its object in Neoplatonism. Rather, thought is always an unfolding of its object. And while it is true that we have as our aim to rest in *Nous*, and then the One, and that this resting comes about to a great extent through thinking, it is not *as* thinking, but rather by remaining silent after a great effort of thinking that we come, as Proclus says, to the paternal harbour.

After these [explanations], then, let us take up the fourth way of solving the aporia. <It is not lawful> that the soul ascending to Intellect ascend with its multitude of powers, but it must let go of everything which is akin to it and whatever divides its activities. And having mounted on high and come to be there, and having come to anchor in the One-Being, it must bring itself towards the One itself, and make itself one, not being curiously busy about many things and not inquiring "what is it not or what is it?," but rather closing its eyes altogether and gathering together all its activity and being satisfied with unity alone. And it is exactly this which Parmenides is imitating, when at the end he removes even the negations and every account, wishing to conclude the argument on the One by moving towards the unspeakable. For the anchorage must be the end of the journey towards it, the "abiding" the end of the ascension, the unspeakable the end of all speech, and unification the end of all knowing.²⁰

I should qualify this statement by saying that by *us* I mean souls, and am referring in this instance to the discursive thought, or *dianoia*, which is properly psychic. But for *Nous* as well this holds. It is through its thinking activity that it divides itself from the

²⁰ Proclus, *In Parm.*, lines 687-698 [p.520 Moerbeke] of "The final section of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*. A Greek retroversion of the Latin translation." By C. Steel and F. Rumbach with an English trans. by D.G. MacIsaac, in *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 8 (1997) pp.211-267.

One, and the entire content of its thought is about the One, but it rests in the One through that in it which is above thinking.

What this analysis of the structure of thinking in Neoplatonism shows, even if the Neoplatonists themselves could not have described it in these terms, is that the dichotomy of apophatic and kataphatic which we are presented with is a false one. It is for this reason that Porphyry thought he could call the first principle *einai* and still think of it as One, and for this reason Proclus can hold that the One itself escapes all thought and all names, and yet still write massive volumes about it. In Neoplatonism the One is not itself a movement of thought, but rather the ground of thought. It does not and cannot contain within itself the moments of consciousness, and so cannot be a sort of *Nous/Being* which eventually turns into Spirit. But neither is the One a simple null-point, as over against an endless historical contingency, as the Heideggerian inspired henologies might seek to produce. Rather, the multiplicities which emerge from the One, as activities of thinking, are not contained within the principle, but they are all about the principle. They are joined to it as the end point is joined to the beginning, and as such are images which point the soul beyond itself back to its origin.

V

The Neoplatonic logic of the one over the many also allows them to have a plausible account of how philosophy can have a history. This is not an account which they themselves gave, but it follows from their principles, and comes to light only in the face of the mutually opposed historiographies of Hegel and Heidegger. What allows a history of philosophy in Neoplatonic terms is our second point, the distinction between *Nous* and *dianoia* as atemporal and temporal mind. For Proclus, as for all other Neoplatonists, the proximate object of discursive reason, of philosophy, is *Nous*, not the One. It is only *Nous* which has the One as its proximate ground for thought. The combination of freedom and necessity which Hegel sees both in the development of the moments of consciousness in itself and in history, for Neoplatonism belongs properly within *Nous*. But because it is atemporal, there is no need to find the moments of *Nous* unfolding in history as they do in itself. The emergence of *Nous* from the One is an absolutely free unfolding, and so the freedom of thought which Hegel sees as the truth of thought is present in Neoplatonism. The One does not precontain the *megista gênê*. Rather, the *megista gênê*, and the determinations of the other two orders of *Nous*, are the free, unplanned, expression of the thinking activity of *Nous*. They *are* the thinking activity of *Nous*, and the contents of *Nous* are in this radical sense *what actually emerged*. In itself this is a free activity. However, the thinking of *Nous* is also the necessary foundation of philosophical thinking, because *for us* it is necessary. *Nous* is grounded in the One, and in turn is the ground of *dianoia*. The Ideas in *Nous* do not change, and so they constitute the necessary object of a philosophical thinking which since Plato and Aristotle has understood this object to be unchanging and universal. *Nous*, as the atemporal ground of philosophical thinking constitutes a total system of living determinations, an order in the cosmos which we attempt to grasp in thinking. This grasp takes place through philosophy, through *dianoia*.

Philosophy takes place in time, through contingent human beings, and therefore has a history. Philosophy is the discursive attempt to articulate to ourselves, in non-

noetic terms, the ordered content of *Nous*. As such it requires that there be a *Nous*, with an internal articulation, in order to be carried out. For this reason the undifferentiated Being of Heidegger cannot ground a metaphysics. The immediate relation of historical thinking to a One would also be only vanishing moments, and so historicity. But the relation of philosophy to *Nous* is that in *Nous* it finds an ordered, unchanging cosmos of Forms, which it unfolds, and whose necessity and constancy give a unity to the philosophical project. It is for this reason that philosophy has a history, but is not a historicity. But the modern mistake is to think that philosophical thinking has the necessity and completion which only belongs to the noetic.

As we saw in our analysis of remaining, procession, and return, philosophy as a return upon *Nous* is not a vanishing moment. What we articulate in philosophy is in fact about *Nous*. But also what we articulate is not already contained in *Nous*. So the history of philosophy is, quite literally, the history of what we have thought about the order of the cosmos. But there is no necessary order within the history of philosophy itself. Rather, it comes to be through a succession of contingent thinkers, all of whom are unfolding one or another aspect of the noetic principle. This activity has a history, because in principle it can never be complete, but contrary to the Hegelian idea, there is no end to this history. The desire for completion or an end to the history of philosophy is a mistaken desire to assimilate the moment of returning to its origin in the remaining. And because philosophy is not *Nous* but has *Nous* as its object and ground, it does not turn Being into a set of static and dead categories as Heidegger thought. Rather, there is always more to be thought about *Nous*.

If these tentative points about Neoplatonism are correct, then we might find in Neoplatonism resources for a philosophy which lies between Hegel and Heidegger, one which can take into account contingency and history in philosophical thinking, but does not do this by destroying its own possibility. Further, I hope it is apparent from this that the Neoplatonic principle is not best understood as a moment on the way to Hegelianism. There is more in it than a movement towards a principle in which the emergent determinations are already present. Rather, the Neoplatonic One is the principle of the free self-determination of the intelligible, which itself is the ground of history.

VI

I would like to make one final point. For Proclus we are essentially souls, but we are also grounded in *Nous* and the One. I have tried to set out in this paper what he means by this. The implication of this is that philosophy is not the highest approach to divinity. It is needed, because to turn the eye of our soul towards our principles is to engage in the activity of thinking about them, and that is philosophy. But if thinking is *about* principles, and not identical with principles, then at the end of our philosophical activity we must come to an affective rest in those principles. It is to try to get us to do this that Plotinus wrote in the manner in which he did. In his *Enneads*, which present the limits of the discursive activity of philosophy so clearly, he tries to turn his readers' souls towards *Nous* such that they may cease to philosophise and become *Nous* itself.²¹ And

²¹ See for example, *Enn.V.8*.

beyond this movement to a thinking beyond philosophy is the shedding of all multiplicity for a unity with the One itself. But in this Plotinus is not urging us to *go* anywhere, because the principles are completely present to us. “There is nothing between but the fact that they are different,”²² as he says. So after our effort of turning our soul towards our principles philosophically, we find that the god does not “come as one expected, but came as one who did not come: for he was seen, not as having come, but as being there before all things, and even before Intellect came.”²³ If that were not the case, then our effort of philosophising would be impossible.

²² *Enn.* V.1.3.

²³ *Enn.* V.5.8.